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ON CHAUCER'S VERSION OF THE DEATH OF
CROESUS.

IN the Chaucer Course at Columbia University during the Summer Session of 1904, the attention of the students was called to Chaucer's peculiar version of the death of Croesus by Professor A. V. Williams Jackson, whose interest in Persia led him to comment on points connected with Cyrus and the Lydian king.

The story of Croesus is found in Herodotus, *Hist.*, 1. 85, *seq.* (C. Rawlinson's Transl., 1858, vol. 1, p. 225, *seq.*), Plutarch. *Solon*, 27 (Transl. by Stewart and Long, pp. 154-156), Boethius (short allusions in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, lib. 2. 2, line 32), and in many other authors down to Boccaccio (*De Casibus virorum illustrium*, lib. 3. 20). Although the versions vary considerably in the amount and character of the details that are given, they always agree on one point (for exception, see note 8, below), namely, that Croesus, though condemned to death, was not actually executed, but his life was saved by some intervention. Chaucer, however, represents him as dying on the gibbet after having escaped the pyre which was to have been his fate. In his translation of Boethius (*Boece*, 2, line 310, Pollard, Globe edition), Chaucer does not add anything to the brief allusion he found in his source.¹ But in the *Hous of Fame*, book 1, line 103, and in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, line 4326, he alludes to the death of Croesus on the gibbet, and in the *Monk's Tale*, line 3917, he gives a full account of the monarch's death.

¹ Boethius (Teubner), lib. 2, 2, line 32. "Nesciebas Croesum regem Lydorum Cyro paulo ante formidabilem mox deinde miserandum rogi flammis traditum misso caelitus imbre defensum."

As the gibbet version is found in Jean de Meung's *Roman de la rose*,¹ of which we know that Chaucer made a translation,² it is likely that the poet came across the story there. But the question is next, to determine from what source Jean de Meung himself drew his material. M. Ernest Langlois in his notes on the *Roman de la rose*,³ says that this particular version of the fate of Croesus, and especially of the rôle of Phania, the daughter of Croesus, is to be found only in the mythographers discovered by Cardinal Angelo Mai, and published at Rome in 1831.⁴ Prof. Skeat, in his *Notes to the Canterbury Tales*,⁵ states that the version is given in the 13th century by Vincent de Beauvais in his *Speculum Historiale*.⁶ Vincent de Beauvais mentions Eusebius⁷ as his authority for the date of the fall of

¹ Jean de Meung took over Guillaume de Loris' work at verse 4070 (see ed. Méon); the Croesus episode is spun out from verse 6513 to 6646. *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Méon, Paris, 1814.

² See Skeat, *Complete Works of Chaucer*, Vol. 1. *Introduction to Romaunt of the Rose*.

³ *Origines et sources du roman de la rose*, par Ernest Langlois, Paris, 1891.

⁴ *Classicorum Auctorum e Vaticanis codicibus editorum*, tomus III, curante Angelo Maio, Romae 1831.

⁵ Skeat, *Complete Works of Chaucer*, Vol. 5. *Notes to the Canterbury Tales*, p. 246.

⁶ Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum Historiale*, Strassburg ms. 1473, lib. 4, 17; some other mss. lib. 3, 17. When Vincent de Beauvais says that Croesus was taken prisoner three times, he probably understood the several versions from which he quotes as referring to different captivities: thus he says that Justin and Orosius tell about the first captivity.

⁷ In *Eusebii Pamphili Chronicorum*, lib. 2 (S. Hieronymo interprete), *Patrologiae Latinae*, tomus 27 (ed. J. P. Migne, Paris, 1866), we find the two statements mentioned by Vincent in connection with the columns of the names and dates of the Lydian kings. Eusebius also briefly refers here to the oracle of Apollo, on the ambiguity of which he speaks more fully in his *Praep. Evang.* 5, 20. This episode we meet in several of the versions of the fate of Croesus in which he survives the overthrow of his kingdom. Though the second book of Eusebius's *Chronicles* is undoubtedly based upon the first one (see A. Schöne, *Die Weltchronik des Eusebius in ihrer Bearbeitung durch Hieronymus*, Berlin, 1900), we find opposite the name of Croesus: *Croeso interfecto*, *Cyrus Lydorum imperio finem imposuit*. In the Armenian-Greek-Latin text (Venice, ed. J. B. Anchor, 1818) the Latin wording is: *Croesum Cyrus perimens, Lydorum imperium sustulit*.

the Lydian kingdom, giving Eusebius's own words and also the citations from the other sources to which he refers, such as Boethius, Justin,¹ Orosius,² and, at the end of the paragraph, Solinus.³ After referring to Justin once more, and before he comes to Solinus, Vincent gives the version which Prof. Skeat quotes, beginning with the words: *Alii Historiographi* warrant quod in *secunda* captione iussit eum Cyrus rogo superponi.

The rôle of the Lydian king's daughter is contained in the version, which is indeed very similar to the one underlying Jean de Meung's (minus the French poet's elaboration), and it resembles the version of the mythographers, except in two particulars. In the first place there is nothing in Jean de Meung about Croesus being placed on the pyre in his second captivity. In the next place Jean de Meung gives the daughter's name as Phania, which is not mentioned in Vincent de Beauvais. Now in both these points, namely the absence of any reference to a captivity prior to the one with the pyre episode, and in the mention of the daughter's name as Phania, the story as given by the mythographers,⁴ agrees both with Jean de Meung's and with Chaucer's version and differs from the one given by Vincent de Beauvais. This would naturally lead us to consider whether the version given by the mythographers has not a greater claim to our attention than the only one that has yet been mentioned by Chaucer scholars, namely, the Vincent de Beauvais narrative, and it is

¹ *Justinus, Trogi Pompei Historiarum Philippicarum Epitome*, lib. 1, 7, lines 1-13. (Teubner.)

² *Paoli Orosii Historiarum adversos paganos*, lib. 2, 6, 7. (Teubner.)

³ *Cassii Julii Solini Polyhistor*. Ex Editione Claudii Salmasii, Lipsiae, 1777. Cap. 1, 106.

⁴ About Cardinal Mai's mistake concerning the names and dates of these mythographers, see Teuffel-Schwabe, *History of Roman Literature*, vol. 1, 42, 10, and also O. Rossbach, in *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie*, Jahrgang 131, pp. 408 to 410. According to Rossbach, all we can say about the first and earliest of the mythographers, is that he lived after Isidorus, who died in the year 636 A. D. The second mythographer seems to have borrowed almost word for word from the first. The value of these mythographers consists mainly in containing sources which have not been preserved anywhere else.

peculiar that it has not yet found a place among the possible sources of Chaucer's version. I shall therefore give it in full as found in the first and in the second mythographer, quoting from the edition which I have already mentioned.

MYTHOGRAPHUS I, 196.

HISTORIA CROESI REGIS LYDIAE.

Croesus rex Lydorum aliquando a rege Persarum Cyro captus, rogo est suppositus. Subito tanta pluvia exorta est, ut ignis extingeretur, et ipse occasionem inveniret fugiendi. Hoc cum prospere sibi evenisse gloriaretur, opum etiam immensitate nimium se iactaret, dictum est ei a Solone, uno de VII sapientibus non debere quemquam in divitiis et prosperitate gloriari, cum nesciamus quid superventura pariat dies. Eadem nocte vidit in somnis, quod Juppiter aqua eum perfunderet, solque extingueret. Quod cum filiae suae Phaniae nuntiaret, illa ut res se habuit prudenter resolvit dicens, quod cruci esset affigendus, et aqua perfundendus et a sole siccandus. Quod postea ita contigit: nam rursus captus a Cyro et crucifixus est.

MYTHOGRAPHUS II, 190.

DE CROESO.

Croesus rex Lydorum aliquando a Cyro rege Persarum captus, rogo superponi est iussus. Subito tanta pluvia facta est, ut ignis extingueretur et ipse occasionem fugiendi inveniret. Hoc cum postea prospere sibi evenisse gloriaretur, et opum immensitate se iactaret, dictum est ei a Solone uno de VII sapientibus non debere quemquam in divitiis et prosperitatibus gloriari, cum nesciamus quid eventura pariat dies. Eadem nocte vidit in somnis quod Jovis eum aqua perfunderet et sol extingueret. Quod cum filiae suae Phaniae nuntiaret, illa ut res se habuit prudenter interpretabatur, dicens quod in cruce esset affigendus, imbre perfundendus, sole siccandus. Quod postea ita contigit: nam rursus captus est a Cyro et suspensus.

It will be evident from what has been given above that Chaucer's version of the death of Croesus resembles the story told by these mythographers more closely than the one found in Vincent de Beauvais. Yet no mention of these mythographers has thus far been made in this special connection by any commentator on Chaucer, and I hope that this note may not be without interest, for that reason, to students of our first great poet.

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